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A
S E R M O N

Preach'd at the

Evening-Lecture

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SALTERS-HALL,

July the 15th, 1716.

By JOHN EVANS;
Upon his leaving that Lecture.

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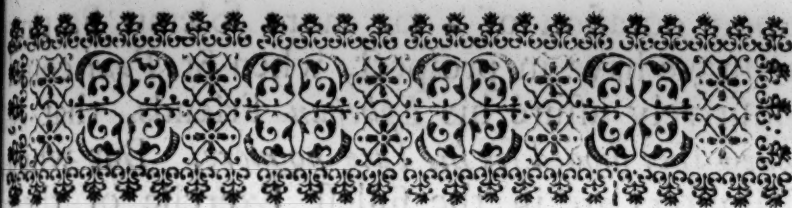


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ACTS XX. 32.

And now, Brethren, I commend you to God, and to the Word of his Grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an Inheritance among all them which are sanctified.



*M*Y Heart's Desire (my good Friends) and Prayer for you all, is, that you may be saved. This Station, in which I have so long serv'd you with Pleasure, and the uniform Course of your Respect and Affection for *ten* Years together, lay me under peculiar Obligations always and earnestly to wish your Welfare.

I have chosen to express this at parting in the Language of the Text. And let it not seem assuming, that I borrow the Words of a very great Apostle; when they contain no more than the Duty and Desire of every faith-

ful Minister, for such to whom he has spoken the Word of the Lord. They were deliver'd upon occasion of a far more solemn Parting than we have in prospect, when St. Paul could positively assure his *Ephesian* Friends, that he *knew they should see his Face no more*. But while Ministers are in the fullest Exercise of their Work among a People, they will, they must daily commend them to a higher Care and Conduct than their own, if they would hope for Success; and therefore will see reason to do so with greater Solemnity, when a Period is put to their stated Service in a Place. This is most

Ver. 25.

Ver. 17, 28.

directly the Apostle's Farewel to the *Elders* or *Bishops* of the Church of *Ephesus*. But without doubt the People were concern'd in many parts of his Discourse as much as their Ministers: and 'tis very probable were present upon the Occasion. There is nothing in the Text, which does not as properly concern Christians in common, all that were of that religious Society, and design'd for a Place in the *General Assembly of the Church of the First-born* above. And the Verse immediately preceding the Text plainly comprehends the whole Body of Christians at *Ephesus*; for the Apostle calls them to remember, that *for the space of three Years he ceased not to warn every one night and day with Tears*.

Ver. 31.

There are two Things which I would observe in the Words, and discourse of, before I make the particular Application to you, my Friends, which I intend.

I. St. Paul's affectionate Desires for those, among whom he had preached the Kingdom of God. They are compriz'd in the latter part of the Verse, that they might be *built up*, and have an *Inheritance given them among all those which are sanctified*; or in other words, that they might flourish in Grace here, and arrive safe in Heaven at last. His Love to their Souls would not allow his Wishes for them to stop short of these inestimable Benefits. If he had known any thing better to desire for them, he would have mention'd that. But he knew, that there was nothing necessary to their best Interests, which was not either suppos'd or included in these.

II. The Course he takes, when he was leaving them, as the most likely Means for accomplishing these Desires: *I commend you to God, and to the Word of his Grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an Inheritance, &c.* They are the greatest and the best Things, which I am solicitous for upon your account; and I am earnestly desirous you may not fail of them. Therefore I commend you to God, and to the Word of his Grace, to secure these Blessings to you.

I. We are to observe the Apostle's affectionate Desires for those, among whom he had preach'd the Kingdom of God. They are such Blessings as would make them more excellent than their Neighbours in this World, and eternally happy in the other. They consist of two Branches.

First,

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First, That they might be *built up* or *edified*. This Metaphorical Expression, so often us'd in the New Testament, is either apply'd there to Christian Societies, or to single Persons.

'Tis sometimes apply'd to the whole Church of Christ, or to particular Bodies of his Disciples. And then it may comprehend in it both the Addition of serious People, by Conversion to the Church of God, and the common Improvement in Religion of the several Persons who constitute Religious Societies. The Ministry is design'd *for the edifying of the Body of Christ* in general; both by the Accession of Numbers to the Christian Body, and by the Increase of every good Word and Work in those who already belong to it. *When the first Churches had Rest* from Persecution, upon the wonderful Conversion of this Apostle, they *were edified*; and *walking in the Fear of the Lord and the Comforts of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied*. An unspeakable Pleasure it will be without doubt, to every good Minister, or faithful Disciple of the Lord Jesus, to see Christianity spreading, many flocking as Doves to the Windows, worshipping Assemblies, and Societies filling, and new Converts entering themselves apace into such Nurseries for Heaven. This is so much for the Honour of the Redeemer, the Interest of immortal Souls, the Credit of the Gospel, and the Benefit of such Societies; that he deserves not the Name of Christian, much less of a Christian Minister who is indifferent and unconcern'd about the Edification of the Church in this respect.

Eph. iv. 12.

Act. ix. 31.

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But the Metaphor most commonly denotes the farther Improvement of those in Christianity, who are already entred into that School. When the Edification of Societies is spoken of, this appears the ordinary Intention of the Phrase; therefore in the Place just mention'd, the *Edification* of Christian Churches is distinguish'd from their *being multiply'd*. And when apply'd to particular Persons, this is always the Sense. And I take it to be the Apostle's Meaning here.

Not that we can suppose him altogether free from Fear, that some of his Hearers had not yet begun in earnest to obey the Gospel. He knew it to be a very possible Case, and not improbable, that he might *have bestowed Labour in vain* upon some of them. This is plainly oppos'd in the Context, when he says, *I am* Ver. 26.
clear from the Blood of all Men; wherein he plainly intimates an Apprehension, that some would have their *Blood upon their own Heads*, tho it could not be *required at his hands*. But probably the Body of this People made a very credible Profession; and therefore he speaks of them in a Strain of Hope, that the Foundation was well laid, and that they needed only to be built up and to finish well. Would to God, we had reason to entertain as general Hopes of all our Hearers now-a-days, even of the *things which accompany Salvation*! But indeed when Religion is become a National Profession, and in Times of Ease and Liberty; this naturally occasions more promiscuous Assemblies; and we have less ground to take it for granted, that

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a good Work is begun in all that attend our Ministry, than they had in the Primitive Times. And as they omitted not in their Circumstances frequently to admonish even visible Christians to see they were well grounded, as well as about the Superstructure; we are much more oblig'd to do so.

But upon supposition the Foundation was laid by their sincere Turn to God in Christ the Apostle's next Desire for them was, that they might be *built up*. He was sure at least that they *had not yet attained, nor were already perfect*; but room was left for great Advance before they arriv'd at Heaven. He is therefore solicitous for their Edification. Now this eminently consists in four things.

1. In the Increase of Christian Knowledge. To be built up, is to be farther acquainted with Divine Truths and particular Duties, in the full Extent and Compass of them; and to have more clear and distinct Apprehensions of those Things, to which we are not wholly Strangers.

1 Cor. xiv. 20. We should not continue *Children in Understanding*; but be *nourished up in the Words of Faith and of good Doctrine*. That we may

1 Tim. iv. 6. *bound in Knowledge and in all Judgment, and approve Things which are excellent; or discern and distinguish the Things that differ, as the Word*

Phil. i. 9, 10. *may be render'd: that we have our Senses exercised, to discern both Good and Evil*. And upon this Head of Edification, you'll do well to

Heb. v. 14. remember, that it lies not so much in the Increase of airy Notions, and abstruse Speculations; of which I may say, as the Apostle

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the Jewish Fables, that *they minister Questions*, ^{1 Tim. i. 4.} rather than godly Edifying: as in a growing Knowledge of those Truths, which immediately direct, or principally influence Christian Practice. Nor will it be so much your Edification to be able to pass a nice Judgment on the circumstantial Matters of Religion (tho that is useful in its place) as about the great and necessary Points of Faith and Practice. Therefore this Apostle, after he had declar'd, that *the Kingdom of God is not Meat and Drink*; ^{Rom. xiv. 17.} that Christianity depended not on the Truth of either side of the Question, which was agitated between the Jewish and Gentile Converts, about the Lawfulness of eating the Meats prohibited by the Mosaical Law; they might be good Christians on either hand; *But the Kingdom of God is Righteousness, and Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost*: After he had thus distinguish'd the Vitals of Christianity from its external Parts, he adds an Exhortation; *Let us therefore follow after the Things* ^{Ver. 19.} *which make for Peace, and Things wherewith one may edify another.* Let us behave in the lesser Matters with that Moderation and mutual Forbearance, which will promote Peace and Love; and mainly cultivate in our selves and others that Righteousness, and Peace, and Joy, which will be most for our own and their Edification.

2. In the Progress of Faith. *Building up your selves* (says St. Jude) *in your most Holy Faith.* ^{Jude 20.} We may have very clear Apprehensions of Divine Matters, and yet be Christians of a low Size, thro the Feebleness of our Persuasion a-

bout them. But we are edify'd, as our Assent to them grows in Firmness and Stability, as it gains the Ascendant over the Remains of Doubt and Infidelity; for these weaken the Practical Force and Efficacy of the most excellent Principles: As our Belief of Reveal'd Truths approaches nearer to that Rest of Mind, which Knowledge gives in other Cases; to a *Plerophory*,

Heb.x. 22. *or full Assurance of Faith.* Our Faith collects

Chap.xi. 1.

that it is *the Substance of things hoped for, and the Evidence of things not seen.* When it makes

the Truths of our Bible to appear substantial and certain upon the Testimony of God, tho they are at a distance from us, and without the Evidence of Sense and Reason for them: and all its Precepts to be esteem'd good and reasonable, because they are the Result of Divine Wisdom and Authority. If we are careful in

examining and digesting the Grounds of our Faith, and more *able* by that means *to give* our selves and others a *Reason of the Hope that is in us*; this is Faith advancing.

1 Pet. iii. 15.

3. In the Improvement of Universal Holiness in Heart and Life. All the Progress we make in Knowledge and Faith is in order to this; tho our Knowledge were enlarg'd to the Measure of an Angel's, without this Effect it would

1 Cor. viii.

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only *puff up*, and *not edify*: And the Faith, which has not its Fruit unto Holiness, is no better than the Faith of Devils. But true Edification lies in the Progress of the Divine Life, answerable to what we know and believe. If the several Principles of Faith have a more

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commanding Power upon our Tempers and Conversations; our *Faith working by Love, purifying our Hearts, overcoming the World, and conquering the Devil*: When our disorderly Passions and Affections are reduc'd to the Government of Reason, and our sinful Inclinations mortify'd: When our Souls are inflam'd with Love to God and Man; and in consequence of it, our Lives are more regular and useful, filled with all the Fruits of Righteousness, which may by Christ Jesus be to the Praise and Glory of God the Father: In a word, when our Path is like the *Shining Light, shining more and more unto the perfect Day*; bearing a Resemblance of it, tending towards it, and preparing for it: Then we are building up indeed towards the heavenly Regions. So the Apostle uses the Word; *Let no corrupt Communication proceed out of your Mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister Grace to the Hearers.* That edifies which tends to make Mens Hearts and Lives better.

4. In the Growth of regular Comfort and inward Peace hereupon. To have Comfort rise high, without a proportionable Increase of Knowledge, and Faith, and Holiness, is to build without a Foundation: But to have no Advance in the Peace of our Souls, when we are indeed proceeding in Heaven's Way, is to leave the Building unfinish'd, or rather to spoil the Symmetry and Proportion of it. Comfort and Joy, farther than they have the Supports of real Religion, are mere airy Fancies; and instead of being a Part of Christian Edification, are only

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a hindrance to it. But they make a comely Superstructure upon Growth in Grace, and in the Knowledge of Jesus Christ. God would have his Servants, *thro Patience and Comfort of the Scriptures, to have Hope.* Such Provision is made for their Chearfulness and Serenity of Mind, that they must be highly wanting to their Duty and Interest if they live without it; and deprive Religion thereby of a singular Ornament and Recommendation. Ministers are therefore earnestly desirous that their People may have *strong Consolation*, and partake more of the present Pleasure of Religion along with the Power of it. Now we are built up in Comfort, when upon our Advances in Holiness, we rise proportionably in our Hope of the Goodness of our State, and our Interest in the Blessings of the Covenant. When hereupon we taste more Pleasure in the Presence of God, the Testimony of a good Conscience, and the gracious Discoveries of the Gospel, than in any of the Delights of Sense. When our Skill increases for the proper Application of God's Word to solve our Doubts, to scatter our Fears, and to support us in particular Emergencies: When we are readier than formerly at recollecting those Christian Consolations, which are most apposite to particular afflictive Cases: When our Souls are better guarded against sudden Ruffles and Discomposures, by frequent Meditation on the great Things of Religion, and having *the Peace of God, which passes all Understanding, to keep our Hearts and Minds in Christ Jesus.* This is indeed a Heaven begun in the Soul, when Wi

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dom's Ways are felt to be Ways of Pleasantness, and Paths of Peace; and a Presage of that final Recompence, which makes the other Part of the Apostle's Desire for his good Friends.

Secondly, That they might *receive an Inheritance among all them that are sanctified*. His Wishes for them terminated in nothing short of absolute Blessedness. Their building up included his Desires for them thro Time; and this for Eternity.

That they might have *an Inheritance*. This is a common Description of Heaven in Scripture, and Christians are now stil'd the *Heirs* of it. 'Tis one of the Privileges confer'd on 'em as the Children of God: Being *Children*, they are *Heirs, Heirs of God, and Joint-Heirs with Christ*.^{17.} They become possess'd of it in the way of an Inheritance: And there is the best Security for a continu'd Possession. 'Tis not only a Place of Residence for a time, but a durable Mansion, which they shall never be depriv'd of by Force or Fraud: An Inheritance with all the recommending Characters that can attend one, *incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for us*.^{Rom. viii. 1 Pet. i. 4.}

But 'tis an *Inheritance of Saints*, entail'd only upon them that are sanctify'd. None but the pure in Heart shall see God in his Holy Habitation; nothing that defiles can enter thither: There is an invincible Bar in the way of all others. If it were possible an unholy Soul could be admitted, it would be a Prison, and not a valuable Inheritance to him: nor could it be a State of perfect Happinels to the Sanctified

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fied themselves, if their righteous Souls must be vex'd there, as they are here, with the ungodly Deeds of Sinners.

He wishes his Friends an Inheritance among all them that are sanctified: He knew the Number of Sharers would not lessen the Value of it. There is Provision large enough in that Blessed World fully to satisfy the Wants and Wishes of every Inhabitant, tho there were many more than will actually partake of it. This Thought indeed, of the vast Number of Saints which will be satisfy'd along with us by the Fulness of God's House, is so far from being an Allay to the Prospect, that it greatly inhances the Pleasure. How desirable a thing is it, in a dying World, in a State where dear Friends are often oblig'd to a Separation from one another, and where so few of the Servants of God have ever an Opportunity for Acquaintance, to foresee one common Receptracle of Saints before us, one General Assembly of the Church of the First-born, where all good Men shall meet, and converse together, and never part! where every one shall be happy himself, and all shall rejoice in the Happiness of one another!

Such were the Desires of the Apostle for his Beloved Hearers; when he was leaving them, he was solicitous to meet them again in the Blessed Society above. Now let us see,

II. The Course which he takes, upon his own Remove from them, in order to the Accomplishment of these desirable Ends. He commends them to God, and to the Word of his Grace, as able to effect these things for them. By

By the Word of God's Grace some understand Christ: The Eternal Word, full of Grace and Truth, and out of whose Fulness we receive Grace for Grace. But in commending them to God he seems to have done this already: and therefore I understand it of the Gospel; which may be stil'd, with great Elegance, the Word of God's Grace. 'Tis an illustrious Gift of Divine Mercy and Goodness to a sinful World; there the Grace and Good-will of God to Man is publish'd and proclaim'd; and 'tis the ordinary Means of bringing Apostate Creatures to an Interest in Divine Favour. 'Tis then as if he had said, I commend you to God and his Gospel for these Purposes. And we may observe *three* Things upon this Head.

1. He consider'd with Pleasure, that God and his Gospel were like to continue with them, after he should leave them. Ministers are often call'd to remove *in* this World or *out* of it. But God is still the same throughout all Generations; his faithful Servants are always under the Inspection of that Shepherd, and they may apply to him in all their Wants and Difficulties. Nor are his Influences confin'd to any particular Servants he employs: But *he will be* Mat. xxviii. 20. *with all that are faithful to the end of the World.*

And tho he changes hands for publishing his Gospel; yet *the Word of the Lord endureth for ever*: 1 Pet. i. 25. *And that is the Word, which by the Gospel is preached unto you.* The Sacred Oracles themselves still remain in being, and lie open for the Use of Ministers and People in successive Ages. The Benefit of the particular Instructions

tions of a Minister may survive himself or his own Continuance in a Place. 'Tis to be hop'd these are lodg'd in the Memories and Hearts of some, and may be recollected for Practical Service long after the Delivery of them. God also continues to imploy others upon the same Errand. The Prospect of this is no small Satisfaction to an upright Mind; that God is like to use others, it may be to do a great deal more Good than he himself was capable of.

2. He was persuaded, that God and his Gospel were able to build them up, and to give them an Inheritance. These would be a sufficient Provision to do them all the Good his Heart could wish them. Some apply the Particle *Which* [*which is able*] to God, and other to the Word of his Grace: And the Original will admit either. I apprehend we are to take in both: That God and his Gospel are able to do this; not that it is applicable to both of them alike. No doubt God could secure these great Effects without the Use of his Word. Whereas the Gospel can have no Efficacy of itself without the Divine Concurrence. But since God has appointed his Word as the stated Means of Spiritual Good to the Minds of Men there is no room to expect his extraordinary Influences for conducting Men in the Way to Heaven, separate from his Word. And since the Gospel, where it comes, is usually attended with Divine Efficacy and Virtue, where People honestly do their Part; therefore an Ability and Power for these Ends may fitly be ascrib'd to it. So in another place 'tis declar'd

able to save our Souls. When God and the Gospel are join'd for such a Performance, 'tis not intended to confine the Power and Sovereignty of the great God. The Sufficiency of the Gospel is only this, that it is the Power of God to Mens Salvation: That it is mighty thro God to the pulling down of Strong-holds; and the usual way by which he exerts his Power, and directs us to expect the Operations of it for any good Purpose.

Besides, God ordinarily chuses such Means for any Purpose as are fit and suitable. And in that sense the Gospel may be pronounc'd able to do these things; i. e. sufficient to answer its End, to be a proper Means, in the hand of a wise God, for managing reasonable Creatures. It has all the Ability which can be assign'd to Means, but still supposes a principal Agent to make use of them. It is every way fit to convince and engage Sinners to return to God. It shews good Men in this imperfect State what Improvement they need, directs them to all the other subordinate Means which may assist their Progress, excites their Diligence by the most forcible Motives, and has been remarkably successful with many who conscientiously attended on it to raise them to great Heights in the Christian Life. So it is able to give us an Inheritance. It sets Heaven in our View, as the most worthy Object of our Pursuit, describes the Way which leads to it, and assures us of certain Possession at the end of our Way; it conveys to good Men the Holy Spirit, as an Earnest of the Inheritance, and gives them the Possession

Possession of some Foretastes; it inculcates upon them the Necessity of Perseverance; and when faithfully improv'd, assists them in it that *when a Promise is made them of entering into Rest, they may not come short of it.* In the Sense of all this,

3. He commended his Friends to God, and to the Word of his Grace, to accomplish these good Designs for them: which may be understood either by way of Advice to them, or of Prayer for them.

1st, As a serious Advice to them: As his parting Exhortation, directing them to the most proper Means for their Spiritual and Eternal Welfare; *I commend you to God and his Word:* q. d. Let me recommend it to you as the wisest Course you can steer for your Conduct by the way, and for your finishing well to have frequent Recourse to God as your Guide, and his Word as your Rule. Secure but God for your Friend, keep upon good Terms with him, and sue for his Grace in all your future Course; you'll find that sufficient for you: And carefully attend to his Word *which is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness; able to make the Man of God perfect, thorowly furnished unto every good Work.* And certainly a more comprehensive Summary of proper Advice to People, for securing their final Interests, can hardly be thought of, than to direct them to God and his Word in conjunction. Those who would have the Benefit of such sufficient Conduct, have a great deal belonging

to themselves in order to it. We are to recommend to you the All-sufficiency of God, and the compleat Fitness of his Word to shew you the Way of Salvation: But we must at the same time press you to your Duty, to pray to God, to improve his Influences, to be Workers together with him: We must exhort you to hear, and read, and consider the Word of God, and compare your selves with it, as ever you hope for Success. So we may understand this as an Address to them: Or,

2dly, As a Prayer for them. The Apostle solemnly commits them to God, with Desire and Hope that he would perform these things for them by his Word. The Expression he uses [παράτιθεμαι] properly signifies lodging them as a Trust in the hands of another *. Since he was to leave them himself, he would solemnly commend them into the best hands. He desires God to take them into his own Care and Charge, who was *able to keep them from falling*, and to *fulfil in them the whole Good-pleasure of his Goodness, and the Work of Faith with Power*. In this, as far as it was in his power, he lodges them in the same hands as he did his own Soul. He could not indeed have the same Assurance of Success in the Case of another, as he might have in his own; because he could not be certain that God would keep them by his Power thro Faith unto Salvation, unless he

* See Luke xii. 48. 2 Tim. ii. 2. And παρακαταθήκη is us'd for the Matter lodg'd in Trust, or the Thing committed to another's Care. 1 Tim. vi. 20. 2 Tim. i. 12.

were certain that they had commended their own Souls into his hands. He had a full Assurance in his own Case from the Consciousness of his Sincerity in Self-Dedication. I know
 2Tim.i.12, (says he) *whom I have believed; and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that Day.* But though he could not have an equal Certainty that God would preserve them to his heavenly Kingdom, as that he would keep him, since their own Act, as well as his, was necessary: yet he had ground for a charitable Hope that they were true Believers; and however that might prove, he expresses his Desire of the same thing for them as he ventur'd his own Soul upon, Divine Preservation. And since he knew the Gospel was the ordinary Medium of Divine Grace, he commits them to that also: wherein he must be understood to desire of God the Continuance of that inestimable Treasure among them, and his efficacious Presence and Influence to accompany it. Now in this St. Paul did but imitate his great Master, when he was about to leave his Disciples: then we find him solemnly
 John xvii. commending them to his Father; *Holy Father, 34. keep thro thine own Name those whom thou hast given me.* But since God is us'd to secure and promote the Spiritual Interests of his Servants by means of his Word, he adds, *Sanctify them by thy Truth; thy Word is Truth.*
 Ver. 17.

AND now having set in your View the Temper of this Excellent Apostle towards his old Friends, whom he was about to leave; I would

would close this Exercise in Imitation of so great a Pattern, with commending you also, my valuable Friends and Acquaintance, to God, and to the Word of his Grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an Inheritance among all them that are sanctify'd. Allow me first to do it by an Address to you to this purpose; and then I shall endeavour to apply to God for you.

These two Ways are the best within my power of expressing the Gratitude I owe, and would ever be ready to pay to the *Gentlemen of this Worthy Society*; who either did me the Honour several Years ago to call me to the Service of this Lecture, when my Acquaintance in this City, and especially with them, was of a narrow Extent; or who have generously encourag'd my weak, but (I hope) honest Endeavours since.

I heartily wish the Welfare of you all in the Concerns of the present Life; the Health of your Bodies, the Success of your Affairs, and the Comfort of your Families. But I would rise higher (as my Office calls me, and my Affection to you prompts me) to desire that your Souls may prosper and be in health: and should extremely rejoice, if I could take my leave of You in a manner that should any way promote this Blessed Design. Yet I know all my Wishes and Desires will not reach this End, unless you can be persuaded to join your own Endeavours. I will not take it for granted (tho I would please my self with the best Hopes; God and your own Consciences are the most competent

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petent Judges, how far they can be justify'd that you need no more than Edification in order to the heavenly Inheritance: But beg leave to begin at the Foundation, and proceed on to the Superstructure, in a few Particulars of Advice for your Conduct in the way to Heaven.

1. Let it be your great and governing Aim to secure a Share in the Inheritance above. The first Point of Wisdom is to fix your End right and in earnest to design for Heaven, and chuse it for your final Happiness. This is not so commonly done, even among those who wear the Name of Christians, as you may suppose. They are not aiming at the future Blessedness, who seldom or never think of it: They desire it not for their Portion, who prefer earthly Things to it; or regard it only as a last Resort, because they must necessarily leave this World, and be fix'd either in a Heaven or a Hell: They had rather live here always in a State of Separation from God, and go on sinning and feeding on Husks, if God would let them, than be admitted to the Work of Heaven; but rather than be eternally miserable, they could be content to go to Heaven. This is not like the Temper of the antient Patriarchs, who desired

Heb.xi.16. *a better Country, that is, an heavenly: Nor will find the same Acceptance; in their Case, God was not ashamed to be called their God, and the City was prepared for them.* But God would be ashamed to be call'd the God of such as chiefly favour earthly Things; he'll never confer the Crown of Glory on them who only desire it as a less Misery; and instead of making it their

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supreme Aim, are willing to let it go at a venture. There must be Desires, and prevailing Desires after it in all who would obtain it. And why should there not be such in all our Souls? Certainly nothing can pretend to stand upon a Level with it in Merit. This World, and all things in it, are perishing. What we call an Inheritance here, we must soon be dispossest'd of: in a little, little while we must leave all behind us; and if we have made no farther Provision, shall be as destitute as the meanest Creature. Tho we possess'd the whole World, we should lose our Souls, and find nothing to profit us in the Day of Death, or the Day of Wrath. But there is an Inheritance in Reversion, which truly deserves the Name, wherein we may inherit all things that we can wish for. This is now offer'd to your Choice, and may be secured, if you will, for the time to come. Let us then heartily chuse that now for the Prize we will principally aim at, which we shall infallibly chuse, when we are quitting this World, and standing on the Brink of Eternity.

2. See that you be upon a good Foundation for Eternity: such a Foundation upon which you may hope to be built up unto Everlasting Life. Tis not enough that you are engag'd in a Design for Heaven, unless you set out right in the Way to it! If the Foundation be not firm and strong, all the Building you raise upon it, either of seeming Goodness or of Hope, will sooner or later tumble down: it will be like the House built upon the Sand; when the Rain descends, and the Floods come, and the Winds blow, Mat. vii. 26,

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it falls, and great will be the Fall of it. Let your Profession and Expectations therefore be built upon a Rock. Let your Beginnings be substantial and regular.

See that a saving Change has past upon you, that you are new Creatures, have a new Heart and a new Spirit, quite different from the Biases and Inclination of deprav'd Nature. As long as the carnal Mind has the Ascendant and Dominion in you, you are in a State of Death, and under the Sentence of it. And all the good Appearances you wear are but the Shadow of Religion in God's Account; a new Principle is wanting to their Acceptance or Continuance.

It concerns you to have your Peace and Reconciliation with God settled by a hearty Acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ, as he is propos'd in the Gospel. We cannot approach to God as innocent Creatures; and therefore the Foundation of our Interest in him must be laid in a Pardon. Now the Way which Divine Wisdom has settled for our coming at a Pardon, is by our Acceptance of the Mediator, who has procur'd one. We must be in him, and related to him, according to the Tenor of the Gospel, before we can be discharg'd from Guilt.

Rom. viii.
1.

There is no Condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. Separate from him we are still condemn'd as Heirs of Death, and therefore utterly destitute of all Right to the Inheritance. It lies upon you then, as ever you would be admitted into a State of Friendship with God, to receive Christ in his whole Character; to become the teachable Disciples of this great Pro-

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phet in all things which he says unto you, and the willing Subjects of this anointed King and Lord, and to depend entirely upon his Propitiation and Interest with God to recommend you to his Favour.

And hereupon you must commend your selves to God thro Christ by a personal Surrender. This is the great Claim of the Gospel. *Present your Bodies (your selves) a living Sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable Service:* Or, as in the same Epistle, *Yield your selves to the Lord.* Rom. xii. Ch. vi. As soon as you do this heartily, God gives Himself to you, and along with Himself a Security for all the Benefits you need from an All-sufficient God. You have most of you, I suppose, been dedicated to God by your pious Parents; they knew no better way of expressing their tender Affection to you, than by commending you to God in the most solemn manner they could; and I hope they have often renew'd this Dedication by fervent Prayers to God for you. Your Ministers have often done the like by their Prayers; I would, in the most affectionate manner I can, do so now at parting. But after all this you'll be eternally depriv'd of the Divine Favour, if you commend not your selves to God. Be persuaded therefore deliberately, seriously, without reserve, with full purpose of Heart of cleaving to the Lord, to join your selves to him in a Covenant never to be forgotten.

Delay not, I beseech you, this solemn Introduction to the Christian Life. Suppose Death should overtake you before it is done, need I tell you that instead of a Share in the promised Inheritance, you can have nothing to look for but Judgment

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and fiery Indignation? Need I tell you, that the deciding Day is at hand? That all possibility of securing this Prize will soon be over? And the Gospel, which had so kind an Aspect upon your Welfare, and which has so long, so frequently, so earnestly been tendred to you; if it be receiv'd in vain, instead of giving you an Inheritance, pronounces your Doom, and will be a *Savour of Death unto Death* to you. Better were it for you to have your Lot cast in the darkest Regions, and remotest Corners of the Earth, than under the Notices and Offers of a Saviour, if, notwithstanding all the Methods of Grace, you should continue impenitent. Oh that none, to whom I have spoken the Word of the Lord, may miscarry at last! That would be unprofitable to you and to me. How must we meet at another Day, if the Word of Life leaves you dead to Sin? if the great Salvation set in your view is neglected? if instead of yielding your selves to God, you go on to say to him, Depart from us, for we desire not the Knowledg of thy Ways? In such a Case I tremble to think of the Event. Your Ministers must be oblig'd to appear as Witnesses against you: And the Word which you have heard, the same shall judg you. But if you are brought to know the Grace of God in Truth, and to obey the Gospel, we shall rejoice together in the Day of Christ, that we have not run in vain, nor labour'd in vain.

3. If the Foundation is well laid, aim at the highest Advances in the way to Glory. Rest not in the Hopes of a good Work begun, as if that were sufficient; but ever remember you have a large Field of Action still before you: A Progress necessary

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necessary to be made, Oppositions and Enemies to be overcome in your way; and such Proneness in your own Hearts to be remiss, and to decline, as may justly excite all your Care and Diligence. You have much Work upon your hands, if you would but maintain your first Love. Without Watchfulness and Cultivation your Hearts will become like *the Field of the Slothful, and the Vineyard of the Man void of Understanding, all grown over with Thorns*: Old corrupt Habits and Customs will renew their Strength, you'll lie open to presumptuous Sins, and the Good that is in you be ready to die. But this is not all your Business, to prevent a declining State: God expects every one planted in his Vineyard to thrive and prosper, to grow up towards Maturity, and produce Fruit in Season answerable to the Care and Culture God bestows upon him, and the Time of his Continuance in the Vineyard. Therefore, my Brethren, aim at the higher Degrees of Christianity; Count Phil.iii. 1 *not your selves to have apprehended; but forgetting 14. those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those which are before, press toward the Mark, for the Prize of the high Calling of God in Christ Jesus. Giving all Diligence, add to your Faith, Vertue; 2 Pet. i. and to Vertue, Knowledg; and to Knowledg, Tem- 6, 7. perance; and to Temperance, Patience; and to Patience, Godliness; and to Godliness, Brotherly-kindness; and to Brotherly-kindness, Charity.* Stint not your Wishes and Endeavours by any past Attainments, but still keep the Prize of Glory in your Eye, think what that deserves: Think what Christ design'd you to be, when he gave you a Divine Nature in its Principle; and therefore follow
D 2. after,

11. iii. 12. *after, that you may apprehend that for which also you are apprehended of Christ Jesus.* Such a laudable Ambition will be one of the clearest Evidences that you are born of God: The Spiritual Life, as well as the Natural, carries in it a Tendency to Growth. Let not the Remissness of others slacken your Pace; nor let it content you to come up to some low Examples: but propose to your Imitation the brightest Patterns. *Be not slothful, but Followers of them who thro Faith and Patience inherit the Promises.* What Ornaments will this make you to your Profession! What Blessings to the World! What a Revenue of Glory will your God and your Redeemer receive from you! If Chris-

Pet. i. 8. *tian Graces and Virtues be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the Knowledg of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Can you be Christians, and not aspire at the Honour of your Master? In this Course you'll have the most settled Peace of Conscience, and the largest Share of the Comforts of God's Presence: And
 Jer. 11. *when you have finish'd it, an Entrance will be ministred to you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

4. As ever you would thus proceed with Comfort and Success in your Way to Heaven, attend with Care and Perseverance upon all Divine Institutions, as the Means which the Wisdom of God has appointed for your Improvement. They that think themselves above these, are in truth commonly of the lowest size in real Christianity, whatever they are in other respects. The Word of God is particularly mention'd by the Apostle here. I would earnestly recommend it to you all,
 carefully

carefully to study the Holy Scriptures. Read your Bibles daily, and consider them when you read them as the Word of God, and not as the Word of Man. While you imploy your selves in reading other Books for Improvement or Diversion, I beseech you shut not out the Book of Life. Every Man at his peril is bound to know the Laws of his Country, so far as to direct his own Practice: Much more are all oblig'd to make themselves acquainted with the Holy Law of God, by which they must stand or fall for ever. You are in a Protestant Country, where you have this Advantage with Freedom: Deny not your selves the Key of Knowledg, when 'tis not in the power of your Popish Enemies to take it away from you. And forsake not the assembling of your selves together, for hearing the Word of God preach'd. The Ministry of the Gospel is God's Ordinance for the edifying of the Body of Christ, and for the perfecting of the Saints; and to continue for that purpose, *till we all come in the Unity of the Faith, and of the Knowledg of the Son of God unto a perfect Man*: till the whole Christian Church arrives at its State of Maturity, *i.e.* till it comes to Heaven, *till that which is perfect is come*. Come not to it Eph. iv. 11, 12, 13. 1 Cor. xiii. 10. merely from Custom or Curiosity; regard it not only as a lovely Song of one that has a pleasant Voice, or that Ezek. xxxiii. 32. can play well on an Instrument: But let it be the End you propose to your selves in every Sermon you hear, to become one way or another wiser and better by it. Then it may be hoped, that *the Word preached will profit you*. But rest not here: It should be your Character to walk in all the Ordinances and Commandments of the Lord, blameless. The Word of

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of God directs you to the Use of other Means besides it self: And if you live in the Neglect of them, you have no reason to esteem it a strange thing, if God should deny his Blessing to his Word. Private Meditation, frequent Examination of yourselves in your Retirements, are Duties enjoined in the Holy Scriptures on Christians: And publick Ordinances are not like to obtain their End without these.

But there is one particular Duty more, which I would especially recommend to you, to renew your Covenant with God at the Lord's Table. I rather think it necessary to press this upon you, who are generally a Society of younger Persons; because many, who in other respects appear hopeful and serious, seem to think their Youth excuses them from observing this Institution of Christ more than others: for what reason, 'tis hard to say. They cannot satisfy themselves to omit reading the Scriptures, or Prayer, or the ordinary Work of Christian Assemblies; and yet live one Year after another in the constant Omission of the Lord's Supper. Surely, my Friends, this ought not so to be. There is not a more express Order of Christ for the Observance of any Duty by all his Disciples, than there is for this. *Drink ye all of it*, says every Evangelist. If you are sincere Christians, you are not only allow'd, but oblig'd to come. Is it too early to renew the Dedication made of you in your Baptism, to make it your own Act, when you are come to a Capacity of understanding and consenting to it? And if you have done this privately between God and your own Souls, why not also publicly, and in the face of

the World, by that visible Rite which Christ has instituted for that purpose? I'll only add, that 'tis an Appointment particularly intended and fitted for the Assistance and Improvement of Christians; and therefore if you live in the Neglect of it, you must be evidently wanting to your selves in the Means of your Edification.

5. Offer up frequent and fervent Prayers to God for the Success of all the Means you use. This is indeed one of the Means prescrib'd us. But I mention it by it self, as subservient to the Usefulness of all the rest. You cannot be too deeply impress'd with a Sense of your Dependance upon God, and your Need of his Grace for every good Work. The greatest Advantages are like to be lost upon us, if we are negligent in Prayer for the Holy Spirit to make all effectual. Accustom your selves therefore before and after your Attendance on any other Sacred Institutions, to pour out earnest Supplications to God, that they may not prove as Water spilt upon the ground, which cannot be gather'd up again. Pray for God's Assistance to those who minister to you in Holy Things, as ever you would find them Instruments of Good to your Souls.

6. Apply your selves hereupon to the conscientious Practice of your Duty, in the whole Comprehens of it. As fast as Light breaks in to shew you any part of the Will of God, let it be in fact a Light to your Feet, and a Lamp to your Paths: *Be Doers of the Word, and not Hearers only.* Let your Life be squar'd by Rule, and truly a Course of Obedience. Still consider your present Duty, and let the Duty of every day be perform'd in that day. And by a patient Continuance in well-doing,
till

till your time of Service is over, *seek for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality*, and you shall receive *Eternal Life*.

In the Practice of these few Advices, which I have endeavour'd to express with the greatest Plainness of Speech, you'll make Religion your Business now, and find your comfortable Account at last. In hopes therefore of your Regard to the Word of Exhortation, I heartily commend you to God, and to the Word of his Grace; and consign you over to the united Ministration of my worthy *Colleague and Successor*, for the Furtherance of your Faith, and Holiness, and Joy; heartily wishing both for their sakes and yours the Divine Presence and Blessing in this Assembly; the Peace, Union and Enlargement of this Religious Society: and that of this Place it may be said, as of *Sion*; *Thou and that Man was born there*. In the mean while I hope, from your former Affection, that your Prayers shall accompany me into my present Station; which I earnestly intreat as the truest Mark of your Friendship. So the Name of Christ may be magnify'd in our several Assemblies, the Interest of Souls promoted, and Preparation made for comfortable Dying, and for a joyful Reception into Heaven.

Now the God of Peace, that brought again from the Dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the Sheep; through the Blood of the everlasting Covenant, make you perfect in every good Work to do his Will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be Glory forever and ever. Amen.

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